



**AMALIE Arena Media Clips  
Monday, October 30, 2023**

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## **How Lightning's Mikey Eyssimont has embraced the role of pest** **Eduardo Encina (Tampa Bay Times)**

TAMPA — The Lightning's introduction to Mikey Eyssimont came a good three weeks before the team acquired him in a pre-deadline trade with the Sharks last season. He was wearing a San Jose uniform, skating against Tampa Bay's top line Feb. 7 at Amalie Arena, when he decided to become a thorn in Brayden Point's side.

Point had scored two goals in the game when he spun around with the puck in front of the Sharks bench late in the second period. Eyssimont closed in and twirled Point around, hooking his right arm with the Lightning center's, then leaning on Point's back and pushing his head down with his left glove.

It was enough to draw the ire of Point, a capable fighter who picks his spots wisely. Point grabbed Eyssimont with both hands and pinned him against the bench before dropping his gloves in what Point now describes as "a spur-of-the-moment thing."

Point probably was the victor, but Eyssimont got his job done, taking one of the Lightning's top players off the ice for five minutes. And it provided a glimpse of the gritty game Eyssimont now employs for Tampa Bay.

"You get a chance against the top line, you do your job, and if one of them wants to fight, you definitely don't have a choice," Eyssimont said. "I don't remember who asked who, but I wasn't going to skate away. I thought there was no other option.

"It was a relaxing five minutes in the penalty box for me. Probably not as much for him, because he wanted to be on the ice. But I'll take him off the ice any day because he's such a great player."

Now their stalls are next to one another in the Lightning home locker room, and Eyssimont — signed to a two-year contract extension in May — has become an important part of the retooled roster.

"He works so hard," Point said. "And his engine is insane. He's always going — practice, games, it doesn't matter. He plays the game hard, he finishes his checks, he's hard on his stick, he makes life difficult for the other team. And I think this year has been no different, and he's been doing that. His compete level is just so high."

Shortly after Eyssimont, 27, arrived in a March 1 trade for forward Vladislav Namestnikov, he was drawing comparisons to former Lightning spark plug Yanni Gourde, a fan favorite with an Energizer Bunny motor who perfected the art of being a pest.

"When it's helping your team win, that's what makes it fun for me," Eyssimont said. "I just have to realize that this is my game and find a way to love it every game, because that's what my team needs and I want to do anything to help the team win.

"I enjoy being a pest. I enjoy being gritty. I just don't feel like myself when I'm not playing that way."

The Lightning were Eyssimont's third franchise of the 2022-23 season, but he was the kind of player general manager Julien BriseBois was looking for: a hard forechecker who could help protect leads and make the team tougher to play against.

Eyssimont, who takes little time off in the offseason, kept working. He played for the United States at the world championships in May in Finland and Latvia, then worked to get bigger and stronger before being back on the ice in July.

“I love what he did over the summer,” coach Jon Cooper said. “He really worked his tail off to become a better player.

“He’s got that no-quit in him, and he’s a thorn in the other team’s side, and he’s just always wearing on you. I wasn’t sure he could keep that up, but clearly that is in his DNA, and that’s a good trait to have.”

Eyssimont is constantly working to improve, a tablet ever at his stall to review his shifts between periods and after games. He recently started using a new stick blade curl that is helping him dig out pucks better and get a more accurate top-shelf shot.

This season Eyssimont has worked his way into a bigger role in the bottom six. After entering the season with five goals in 55 career NHL games, he has two goals and an assist in eight games, including one Thursday in a 6-0 win over the Sharks. His plus-3 is tops among Lightning forwards, and he is striking a balance between blue-collar hockey and utilizing his offensive skill.

Only Nikita Kucherov has more shot attempts (41) than Eyssimont (34) in 5-on-5 play, and Eyssimont’s 15 scoring chances in 5-on-5 rank fifth on the team, a lot for a player averaging just 10:50 of ice time. The 6-foot, 180-pounder also ranks third among forwards in hits (9).

Eyssimont entered pro hockey as a finesse scorer but realized in his first season with the Kings’ AHL affiliate, Ontario, that he needed to transform his game. He had a lot of difficult talks with Ontario’s coach at the time, Mike Stothers (now an assistant with the Ducks), who told him he needed more to make it to the NHL.

“I think I just had to be kind of honest with myself and just realize I have to do whatever it takes to make it to the next level, make it to the NHL” Eyssimont said. “So, to me, that was adding an extra layer to my game on top of the finesse. It was adding speed; it was adding grit.

“I kind of learned the hard way. Fortunately, I did, and right now I’m kind of in a spot where I know what got me to this level and I know what it takes to stay at this level. So, it’s up to me to bring that every single night.”

It’s a quality all teams look for. When Eyssimont was traded to Tampa Bay, San Jose coach David Quinn was surprised. Sharks general manager Mike Grier quickly flipped Namestnikov to the Jets for a draft pick to aid the Sharks’ rebuild, but Quinn was a big fan of Eyssimont’s game, adding him to his U.S. team for the world championships.

This week, as the struggling Sharks visited Amalie Arena for the first time since the Eyssimont-Point fight, Quinn said he wished his young team showed more of the competitive fire Eyssimont is building his career on.

“As much as he pisses the opponent off, I’m sure he pisses his teammates and his coaches every now and then, which can happen, but I loved having him,” Quinn said. “... He’s a guy that you would go to war with.”

## **Guess who made a surprise appearance at Lightning practice? Kristie Ackert (Tampa Bay Times)**

BRANDON — With about 10 minutes to go in the Lightning's practice Sunday, Andrei Vasilevskiy lumbered out of the locker room at TGH Ice Plex. A month after having surgery to repair a herniated disk in his back, Vasilevskiy made his first appearance with the team for a light on-ice workout as part of his rehabilitation.

Coach Jon Cooper said he was happy to see the goalie getting back around the team but his timeline to return is the same. Vasilevskiy is expected back around Thanksgiving.

"It's great to have him out there, but again, it's not speeding up his recovery. It's just now he's with our team a lot more, which is the best part because he's actually a great guy to be around," Cooper said. "But it hasn't changed, and it's not that he's coming back any quicker. We wish it could happen, but it's just great to have him around, though."

Vasilevskiy, who had a microdiscectomy to address a lumbar disk herniation Sept. 28, was not available for comment. It was clear, however, that his presence on the ice made an impact.

"It's really nice to see a guy getting closer ... to getting back on the ice kind of skating and improving," defenseman Erik Cernak said. "He's a big part of our team, so we can't wait to have him back."

"Obviously, (backup goaltender Jonas Johansson) is doing an amazing job for us. He's been awesome, very good in every single game, performing really well. So we're happy we have him, too. And we have good, good goaltending."

Johansson had just 35 games of NHL experience before signing with the Lightning as a free agent in the offseason. He was thrown into the role of starter by Vasilevskiy's injury and has been a pleasant surprise.

In seven games, Johansson is 4-1-2 with a 2.56 goals-against average and a .925 save percentage. This past week, he posted shutouts in two straight starts with 32 saves against the Hurricanes and 23 against the Sharks.

"I think (Johansson) was a bit of an unknown to a lot of players, and he's come in here and he's earned his stripes," Cooper said. "So you always want to have that guy behind the starter that everybody's got confidence in him. Fortunately for us, we've had that in years past. This one was a little bit more of an unknown because we've had veteran guys back there in the past, but (Johansson) is ... worth his weight in gold."

That will pay off down the line, with Johansson able to step in and help keep Vasilevskiy healthy, defenseman Nick Perbix said.

"I think that's very important, like just to lighten the load for both of them," Perbix said. "Just to know that they have each other's back, and it's always important to have a good goalie tandem. That keeps them well-rested so when they are playing, they're at 100%."

Though Vasilevskiy is weeks away from a return to games, the Lightning hope forward Tyler Motte is closer. Motte participated in his second practice since suffering an upper-body injury in the season opener. He still wore a red no-contact jersey, but he said he felt good and hoped to rejoin the team on the road trip that starts Thursday in Columbus.

“I’d have liked to be back two weeks ago if I could,” Motte said. “I guess it’s the doctors’ and the staff’s job to make sure I’m not at risk of going back too early. But it’s felt good so far. So whatever time when they tell me (I’m back), I’m pretty comfortable.”

Just getting back into practice was a big step.

“It’s always nice to be with the team,” Motte said. “It’s a different energy, and it’s fun to feel more a part of the group and see the guys. It’s just a great group to be a part of, and obviously getting touches and having some sessions with other guys on the ice goes a long way.”

## **Nuts & Bolts: Homestand wraps up against the Kraken** **Chris Krenn (TampaBayLightning.com)**

Everything you need to know ahead of Tampa Bay's matchup against the Seattle Kraken on Monday.

**When:** Monday, October 30 - 7 p.m. ET

**Where:** AMALIE Arena - Tampa, FL

**TV coverage:** Bally Sports (check local listings)

**Radio coverage:** 102.5 MHz-FM, Lightning Radio 24/7

**Where to stream it:** BallySports.com

### **Projected Lineup (subject to change)**

#### *Forwards*

Alex Barre-Boulet - Braydent Point - Nikita Kucherov

Steven Stamkos - Nick Paul - Brandon Hagel

Tanner Jeannot - Anthony Cirelli - Waltteri Merela

Mikey Eyssimont - Luke Glendening - Conor Sheary

#### *Defensemen*

Victor Hedman - Erik Cernak

Mikhail Sergachev - Nick Perbix

Calvin de Haan - Darren Raddysch

#### *Goaltenders*

Jonas Johansson

Matt Tomkins

### **Saturday's Matchup**

The Lightning and Kraken are playing the first of two matchups this season and the only meeting at AMALIE Arena...The Bolts posted a 2-0-0 record vs. SEA last season, winning both games by a combined score of 10-3... Brandon Hagel (1-2—3), Victor Hedman (1-2—3) and Nikita Kucherov (0-3—3) were tied for the Tampa Bay team lead in points vs. SEA last season... Steven Stamkos has found the scoresheet in each of his four career games vs. SEA (2-4—6)...Hedman has also pointed in each of his four career games vs. SEA (3-3—6)...Kucherov has recorded five points in three career games vs. SEA (1-4—5)...Brayden Point has posted a multi-point effort in two of his three career games vs. SEA (1-3—4)...Hagel has pointed in each of his three career games vs. SEA (2-2—4)...Anthony Cirelli has recorded three points over his last three contests vs. SEA (1-2—3)...Conor Sheary has four points in his three career games vs. SEA (3-1—4)...The Lightning have scored three or more goals and conceded two or fewer goals in each of their four contests vs. SEA...The Bolts have surrendered only one power-play goal in 13 opportunities vs. SEA...Tampa Bay has scored three power-play goals in four contests vs. SEA...Over the four meetings all-time vs. SEA, the Lightning have trailed for just 3:48 of the 240 minutes...The Bolts are 4-0-0 all-time vs. SEA...Hedman (3-3—6) holds the Tampa Bay franchise record for career goals vs. SEA and is tied with Stamkos (2-4—6) for the team lead in points.

### **Injuries**

Tyler Motte - Upper-body, out

Andrei Vasilevskiy - Back, out

### **Tampa Bay Sports Item of the Game**

*Halloween 2023 Puck*

The first holiday collection puck for the 2023 season has arrived. Add this Tampa Bay Lightning Halloween puck to your collection. Available in store at Amalie Arena and online at TampaBaySports.com, while supplies last.

**The Road Ahead**

Thursday, November 2 at Columbus Blue Jackets

Saturday, November 4 at Ottawa Senators

Monday, November 6 at Toronto Maple Leafs